

## Personal History Statement

I'll never forget the day... I decided to become an architect. Naive and twelve, I was invited into an unknown love as my father handed me a pile of leftover architecture magazines. My fingers thumbed through the glossy pages of buildings as I perused the images and studied the floor plans. Pulling out my graph paper, I drew and redrew designs with an uncanny intuition. As I slid walls, extended rooms, and articulated spaces, the act of creation connected deep into my core. With paper strewn all around me and pencil smudges on my fingers, I began my career as an architect.

I'll never forget the instant... I became an international citizen. As I stepped out of the airport and onto the streets of the Czech Republic, I somehow recognized my life would never be the same. Although I always knew a world outside of my own existed, this was my first step into it. As if the curtain was pulled, I found myself privy to an intricate play which had been going on all along without my participation. The direction of my future was forever altered as I recognized the enormity of life on this planet and accepted the small part I am to play in it.

I'll never forget the moment... I made a choice to devote my career as an architect to social justice through sustainable development. Suddenly the focus of my purpose moved beyond commercial buildings for the world's wealthy and entered into the humble shelters of the world's most forgotten. Sustainability became not just a white man's choice or a defining credential. It became an opportunity and responsibility to meet life's most basic of needs in a way which doesn't compromise the future. Where architects are needed most, they are present least and I am compelled to go.

Each one of these defining moments marks a significant milestone in my journey. I now see the world through different eyes... as an architect, as a global citizen, and as a designer in the developing world. These views cannot be separated from the construct of me nor can I be separated from the purpose of them. I have made the decision to serve the world through design to elevate the value of life through sustainability, to provide a voice to the voiceless, and to create beauty in the fingerprints of poverty.

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Built into my core is a desire to offer hope to a broken world. Although I have always found the profession of architecture rewarding and a perfect marriage of my analytical and creative skills, I often found it lacking the tangible purpose I yearn to have in life. Teachers are needed all over the world to impart knowledge and doctors have no boundaries in their delivery of medicine. But buildings don't learn and hardly bleed... *what could I really do for a broken humanity as an architect?* I had to ask myself. And then I came across eMi. Engineering Ministries International is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to use architecture and engineering as a means to donate skills to help children and families around the world step out of poverty and into hope. A melding of passion and purpose seemed to be the right fit for me and I immediately submitted my application to intern in eMi's India office.

Eight months later, I found myself on a train through the middle of India with no chance to look back. There was no air conditioning, it was the end of summer, my stomach was making unfamiliar noises and I honestly didn't think I was going to make it to our destination. We were on our way to a city hit by the tsunami off of India's eastern shore to design the first hospital within 100 miles to serve the area. Eager to begin our project, I sat alongside the doctor asking him questions of his medical process and probing into his future dreams. At the end of our week of programming and designing together, he turned to me and said, *'I am a doctor and I know how to make sick people well. But the questions you asked me are making me completely rethink the ways we design our hospitals. In every building we built before, the only architect we had was the brick layer and my finger; we didn't know any other way. But now, I understand what you do and this hospital, these patients, and this country needs you to do it.'*

No, I will never perform surgery on an infected arm, cure a patient of dysentery, or treat a malnourished child. But I can help those who do. I can help them think through their hospital's program before they even place a brick to ensure its circulation will operate more efficiently. I can search to understand their current requirements and ask the right questions to design for their future needs. I can guide the position

of a building so that there is enough area to treat waste water on site and keep drinking water clean. And I place windows in the correct location so cooking fires naturally ventilate and children do not die from smoke inhalation. The purpose I was once lacking I had now found.

After living immersed in the Indian culture for a year, one cannot leave without an intense understanding of the daily difficulties and the deep underlying issues plaguing the country's infrastructure. For me to ignore what I was seeing or to deny what I was experiencing was to turn my back on humanity and say *'You do not matter as much as I do.'* Once I recognized the need, my own pursuits seemed to pale in comparison. I had no choice but to become part of the solution and now faced the dilemma... *'Where do I even begin? My contribution would be but a drop in the ocean...is it even worth my pursuit?'* As if to answer my question herself while I visited her home for the dying in Calcutta, I came across Mother Teresa's inspired words, *'We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean. But if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of the missing drop.'* Though I will not change the world on my own, I will be a part of change within the world. I quickly realized I no longer wanted the lead part in my own little play but was ready to devote myself to a supporting role in the big story of our humanity. I was ready to be a single drop of the water in the ocean.

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It was in a small internet café in the foothills of the Himalayas that I first began pursuing the idea of graduate school. Though I felt competent as an architect and designer in the western world, working in the same capacity in the developing world required a completely different understanding of social, economic and environmental factors which I felt inept to handle. I knew I wanted to immerse myself in an environment of learning so that I might return in some capacity with a deeper skill set and a more complex understanding of the issues I had only begun to uncover. With monkeys jumping beyond my computer screen and the constant honking of cars as my afternoon soundtrack, I stumbled across UC Berkeley's Master of Architecture program in 'Environmental Design & Urbanism in Developing Countries.' Taking a humble approach to the subject, I appreciated the program's perspective to not only give from our knowledge and understanding to the developing nations but also to recognize the countless lessons we have to learn from their world as well. Placing such strong emphasis on social and cultural factors confirmed this was the direction I wanted to move towards graduate studies. Returning from India, I promptly moved to the bay area to work as a sustainability consultant but more importantly, to step towards a Master of Architecture degree at UC Berkeley.

Today marks another mile marker in my journey and a moment I won't soon forget. This application is born of all of the steps I have taken thus far and contributes to the journey yet ahead. Pursing a graduate degree at UC Berkeley will continue to shape my perspective and narrow my focus on the tools both I and this profession need to develop purposes within, outside and beyond the walls of this world.